



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Workshop

A Monthly Journal, devoted to Progress of the Useful Arts

EDITED BY

PROF. W. BAUMER, I. SCHNORR AND OTHERS.

VOL. II.

NO. 3.

ORNAMENTAL IRON-WORK.

BY MR. JACOB FALKE.

Of all the branches of modern Art-Industry, none perhaps has, in an artistic point of view, been so neglected, as ornamental Iron-work. This neglect is indeed only of recent date; for the wrought grilles, gates and railings of our gardens and palaces, as well as other buildings, bear witness that the taste and tendencies of past periods of art up to the present century attached great value to elaborately wrought Iron-work. Nevertheless it seems to have been lately supplanted to a large extent by cast iron. Still the latter will never replace wrought iron, either in respect of its characteristic qualities, or the particular style of ornamentation of which it is susceptible; for notwithstanding the numerous attempts, more or less successful, which have recently been made to appropriate cast-iron for works of art, it has proved altogether rebellious to a truly artistic treatment. To day, when the tendencies of reform in Art-Industry begin to awake a renewed interest for Iron-work, it will seem appropriate to take a short retrospective view of its history in art, to consider its various styles of ornamentation, and to examine how far we may now profit by it, and turn it to good account.

The history of ornamental Iron-work is of recent date for us in Europe. The period of its highest development commences with the craft of the armourer, which, in originating and perfecting plate-armour in the course of the fifteenth century, was truly elaborated into an art. It is true that the excavations of tombs of the Merovingian period show iron ornaments for personal use, elegantly mounted and enriched with silver; but this style of workmanship, which, as it would seem, soon disappeared in Europe, was most likely an ancient inheritance, the home and origin of which might be traced to Asia where it is still extensively practised, as it probably has been from the most remote times.

With the exception of sword-blades, simple casques, etc., the early mediæval period has handed down but few specimens of Iron-work, and only a very small number of them can be ranked as works of art. Where iron might have been suitably employed we find it fre-

quently replaced by brass and bronze, e. g., knockers, of various form and design, bronze lions' heads, etc., still extant. There are however still some specimens of ornamental Iron-work of high artistic value in the Romanesque style and Early Gothic, the most remarkable of which are perhaps the door-hinges of Notre-Dame at Paris, of the second half of the twelfth century. These consist of wrought-iron bands, rather massive and thick in proportion, and worked with admirable precision and elegance, the main stem, from the head of the hinge, throwing off interlaced branches which grow into most elaborate and graceful scroll work, leaves, and flowers, interspersed with all sorts of birds in different positions. They extend over and cover almost the whole door, forming one great ornament of exquisite arrangement and design, and at the same time of great strength and solidity, and representing a most appropriate and charming enrichment. To heighten the effect, all the iron was formerly gilt, the ground being red (see fig. 1).

The technical and artistic principles to which expression is given by the Iron-work of the door of Notre-Dame Cathedral was faithfully perpetuated and further developed by Gothic art, through many examples of great richness and beauty of form. They all show a true understanding of the characteristic property of wrought iron, namely that of stretching and extending under the hammer. In proportion as the iron bars are flattened and beaten under its strokes, they are separated lengthways into two or more bands and branches, starting from the middle, and extending more and more over the surface. The ends receiving the same treatment, the whole forms an ornament of great richness and elegance, the extremities sometimes enriched with curls and leaves, occasionally with animals' heads, etc., as pointed out in the specimen above referred to.

It would be difficult to find an example in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries which could bear comparison with the doors of Notre-Dame in regard to beauty of invention, brilliancy of effect, and precision of workmanship. During the fifteenth century the per-

fection attained in the art of the armourer could not but influence that of the smith and metal worker, in consequence of which ornamental Iron-work and its manufacture received a more extensive and manifold development, and a more delicate treatment and execution. The bands and branches growing into a most elaborate and graceful scroll-work of regular design and form, stamped with ribs and veins, show a more exact rendering of vegetable types. To enhance the effect by light and shade they were partly embossed and hammered from the under surface, adding to the flat treatment the life and play of relief work. The gilding, used in Norman or Romanesque style was, for more delicate work, replaced by tinning, rendering the ornament brilliant like silver, relieved by red or blue ground of parchment, leather or simply paint. The same decoration, which owed its origin to the manufacture of door-hinges, was adopted for all sorts of smith-work, framing the cases of locks, mounting their corners, or covering them with pierced ornament. Particularly finials, and escutcheons on which the knocker or ring-handle was fixed show a profusion of ornament of astonishing beauty and great delicacy of execution (see fig. 2).

This style of ornamentation, although the most frequent, does not apply to all the works of art in Iron-work of Gothic date. Just as Gothic art, in its degenerating course during the fifteenth century, forced its purely architectonic ornament, especially tracery, upon other branches of art, particularly to that of the goldsmith, so also Iron-work, often intimately combined with Architecture, did not escape. Escutcheons of knockers were transformed into Gothic rose-windows; locks, and mountings of doors and other objects were enriched with a variety of pinnacles, crockets, finials and window-tracery, often Flamboyant in style and design, nay sometimes like miniature churches surmounted by tabernacle-work, buttresses, gable-ends, etc. This, certainly, is by no means a commendable treatment even for modern Gothic build-

ings. Also the rich mouldings, panelling, and featherings which were so extensively seen in ornamental wood carvings of the period were all imitated in Iron-work, formed into locks, door-handles, etc.

With the new style in Architecture the sixteenth century brought also a new style of ornamentation for smith-work. For more important, objects hammered, or *repoussé* work was still preferred, and for a long time even in great favour. Especially gates, rails, grilles for the upper parts of arched doors, open screens, etc., were wrought with great skill and solidity, the ornamental motives being formed of small bars, turned into spiral-like scrolls, throwing off tendrils, continually interlacing and crossing each other, and forming new spirals and scrolls, rivetted together, with bold flowers and leaves, interspersed sometimes with birds or other animal types, and even small human figures. Naturally enough the execution of these objects in a material not very appropriate to such delicate work is rather coarse, and the whole must be considered as mere specimens of decoration. Other objects which allowed free scope to the inventive genius and skill of the art-worker were the armatures of wells, and the iron-work of windows, which, on the ground-floor especially, were often completely secured with elaborate screen-work. The heads of the stanchions were, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, frequently enriched with flowers and finials of bold design, affording great variety of form, which soon became very favorite ornaments, used for all

sorts of purposes, as, e. g., for bell-pulls in old houses which are seen in many places of Upper-Austria. The style of ornamentation changing with the ever-varying taste of the period, the heads of stanchions and other decorative-features of railings, screens, etc., received during the eighteenth century all the overcharged and capricious scrollwork, which marks the Rococo period. Nevertheless we cannot withhold our admiration of the

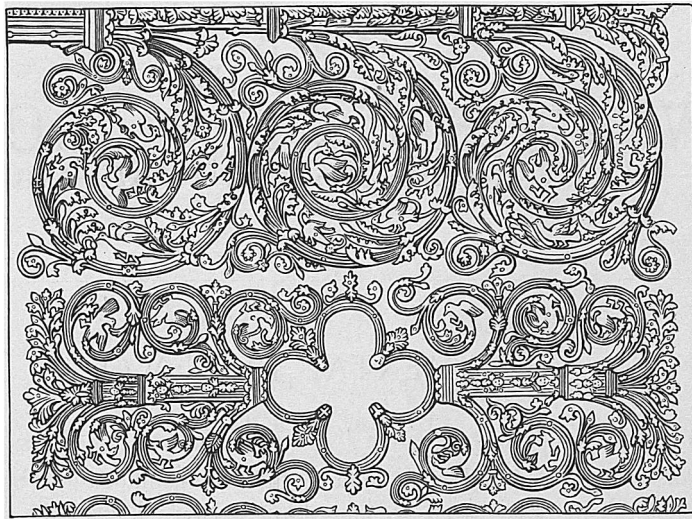


Fig. 1.

Door-hinges from Notre-Dame, Paris.
Twelfth century work.

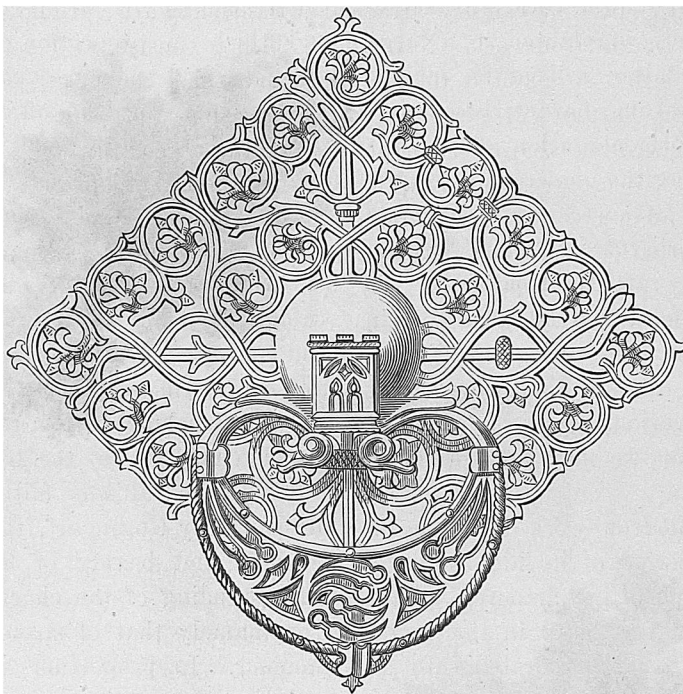


Fig. 2.

Knocker with ornamental Escutcheon.
Fifteenth century work.

creations of that advanced date, which, taken by themselves and independently of style, present most remarkable and astonishing works. They are, if not in form yet in invention and workmanship, the natural expression of true taste and breadth of design.

Many household articles in iron, used in those centuries, particularly utensils for lighting and heating, originated under the hammer. In Italian palaces from the fifteenth century we still find splendid standards and torch-holders, which, without partaking too much of the architectural type of the time, combine pureness of style with exquisite beauty of form. From the sixteenth century many admirably worked fire-dogs and screens, mostly of North-Italian and French manufacture are still extant, a beautiful specimen of the former being in possession of the Austrian Museum. Ponderous and massive as these objects are, they are, although mere black-smith's work, much more in accordance with the demands of a sound and genuine taste, than the comparatively meagre substitutes of polished or gilt brass which decorate our modern fire-side. The wrought-iron candlesticks, formerly used for domestic purposes were of finer and more elegant execution, showing frequently most graceful and original, but nevertheless quite appropriate forms, their invention and design being entirely in conformity with the manufacture and the purpose of the work.

All the above mentioned articles are however devoid of a more delicate and peculiar ornamentation either in style or manufacture, the mode of decoration being restricted to the use of the hammer and file. Still the finer work of the locksmith adopted much of the decoration which had come into vogue through the art of the armourer, from the early part of the sixteenth century.

Partly indeed these works, especially those connected with locks and keys, remained true to their ancient character, the structural form and ornament being still worked by the hammer, while the Gothic types and features, replaced by those of the Renaissance, had to give way to masks, heads, little nude figures, medallions, etc., although rather deficient in the manner of execution. Thus the key-handles, instead of Gothic rose-window tracery, received pierced ornament of the characteristic design and sweep of the Renaissance.

One principal feature was however entirely altered. While the fifteenth century, as above pointed out, had in preference, used relief treatment for iron-work, the sixteenth century, the period of mechanical inventions and improvements, set a high value on the interior construction of locks, which were frequently very elaborate and complicated pieces of mechanism which, with their manifold and most difficult combinations, had to be worked out with the greatest precision, exactness, and solidity. Numerous specimens of most wonderful skill of this kind have been handed down to us. It may be well to mention here that the locks of the Germanic Museum in Nuremberg, taken from the house of *Augustin Hirschvogel* in *Hirschelgasse*, being the work of that dexterous and skilful artist, still do their office as well as at first, in spite of their complicated mechanism, and the wear and tear of three hundred years. So much labour being bestowed on the interior, and so much attention paid to the mechanism, another and lighter sort of decoration for the exterior would appear to be requisite, in con-

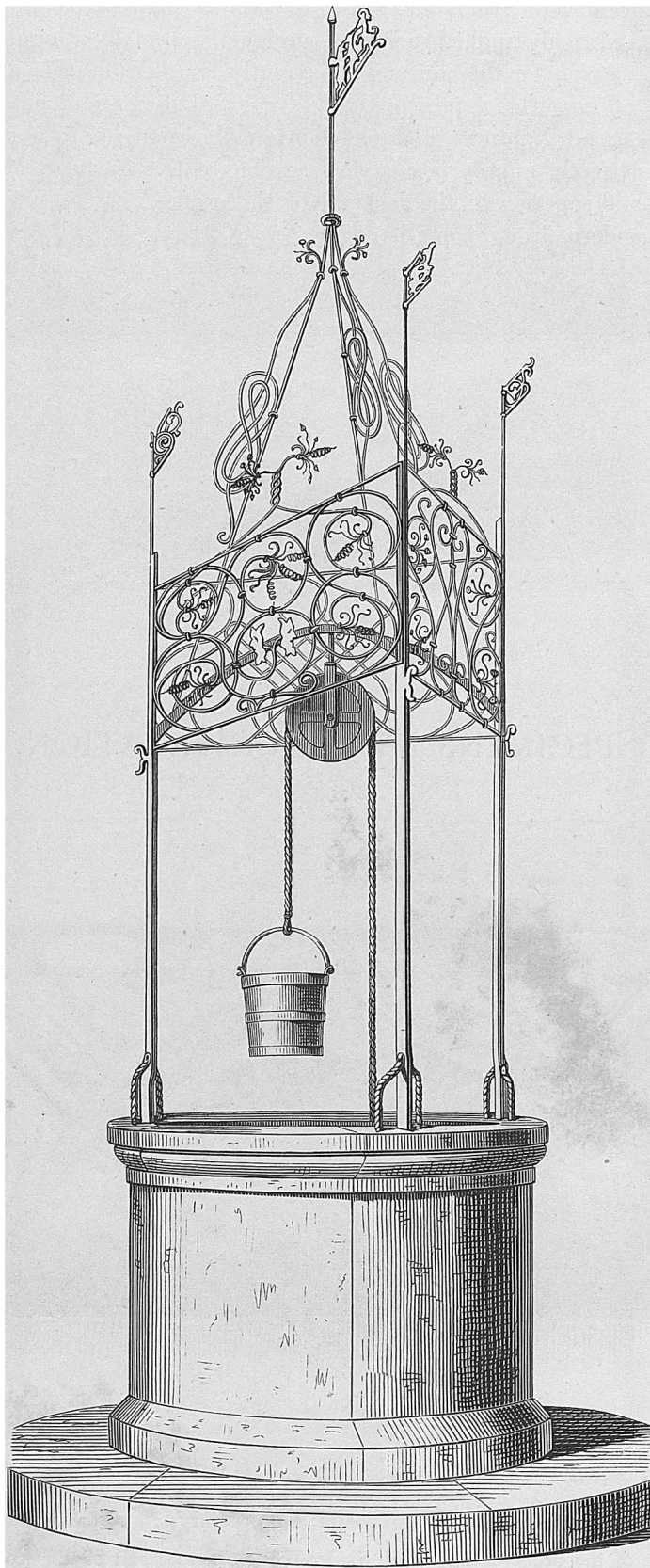


Fig. 3.

Armature of a well, Neunkirchen, Lower-Austria.
Sixteenth century work.

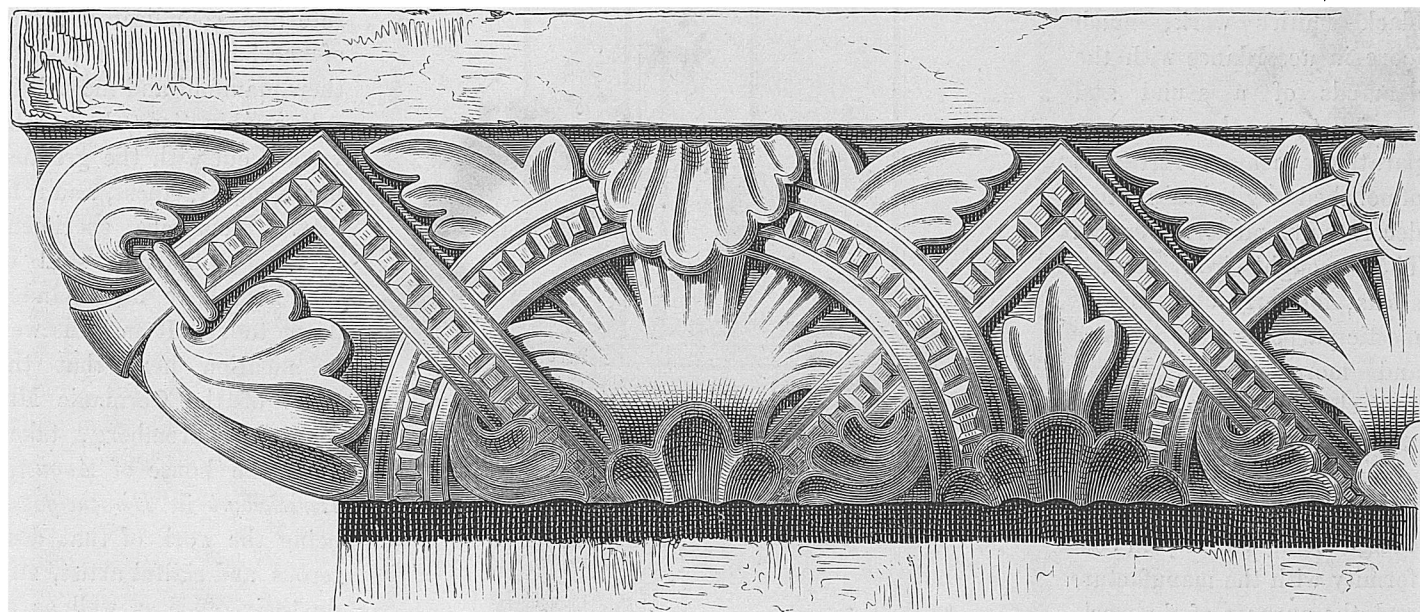
sequence of which the etching of ornament, suggested by the armourer's art was put into requisition for the

decoration of the surface, instead of the relief work formerly used. The ornament was left in blank and highly polished, the ground being etched black, and in order to give it more life and lustre, it was dotted with bright points such as are found in the ancient armours. This mode of decoration was much and richly applied to small iron strong-boxes and caskets, serving for the adornment of parlours and libraries, and offering the requisite surface for such enrichment. Of great lightness and elegance, it was nevertheless a perfectly appropriate style of work, worthy of a revival, and superior to the lacker or varnish painting of our modern iron strong-boxes.

In the old specimens of the sixteenth century there is only this fault, that the ornamental patterns, in comparison with the heavy article they have to adorn appear, much too delicate; considered by themselves, they are frequently of high perfection, exhibiting the most beautiful designs, especially those of the German Masters, who greatly excelled in this art. Two remarkable examples of colossal dimension, but most wonderful ornamentation; originally belonging to a monastery and now in the possession of the Austrian Museum, are true *chefs-d'œuvre* of the craft.

The conclusion in our next.

SPECIMENS OF ORNAMENTATION.



No. 1.

Nos. 1 and 2. Romanesque Style. — Details of Imposts.

No. 1 from Muenzenberg, Hesse; 12th century, $\frac{1}{4}$ of full size.

No. 2 from Church of the order of St. John, Nieder-Weisel, Hesse; end of 12th century, $\frac{1}{5}$ full size.

Nos. 3 and 4. Early Gothic. Foliated Jamb-moulding, between Shafts of Porch of Larchand Abbey, 13th century.

Nos. 5—9. Modern Gothic; Iron Stove. — Mr. E. Boesser, Archt.

No. 5 Front Elevation; No. 6 Detail of pierced Panels; No. 7 Pedestal; Nos. 8 and 9 various Finials for upper part of Stove. Scale of No. 6, $\frac{1}{4}$, No. 7, $\frac{1}{5}$, Nos. 8 and 9, $\frac{1}{4}$ full size.